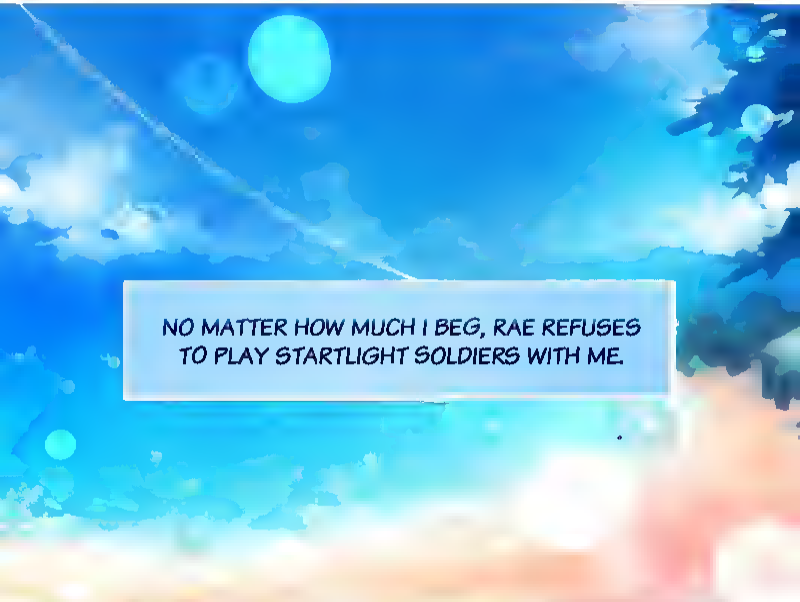
ALWAYS HUMAN

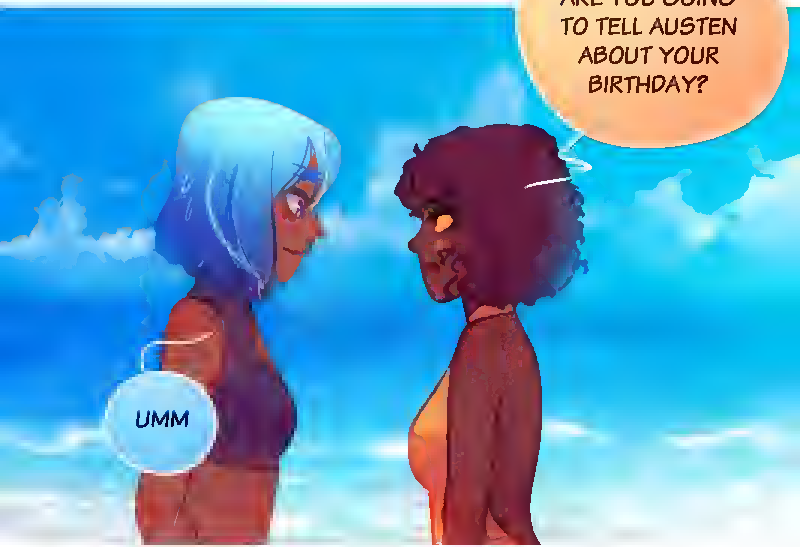
21 - a compromise


NO MATTER HOW MUCH I BEG, RAE REFUSES TO PLAY STARTLIGHT SOLDIERS WITH ME.

INSTEAD, SHE INSISTS THAT WE GO TO THE BEACH.

WHICH IS ACTUALLY A PRETTY AWESOME WAY TO SPEND THE-DAY-BEFORE-MY-BIRTHDAY.

THERE'S JUST ONE SMALL PROBLEM.



RAE CAN BE A BIT STUBBORN.

ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE'S CONVINCED THAT SHE'S RIGHT.

AND SURE, RAE'S USUALLY RIGHT, BUT STILL . . .

I'LL GET YOU OUT AS SOON AS YOU CALL HER.

BUT SHE'S ALREADY SO STRESSED.
?
?
WELL TOUGH.
YOU CAN'T START A RELATIONSHIP BY KEEPING SECRETS.
THAT'S NOT COOL.

OKAY, HOW ABOUT A COMPROMISE?

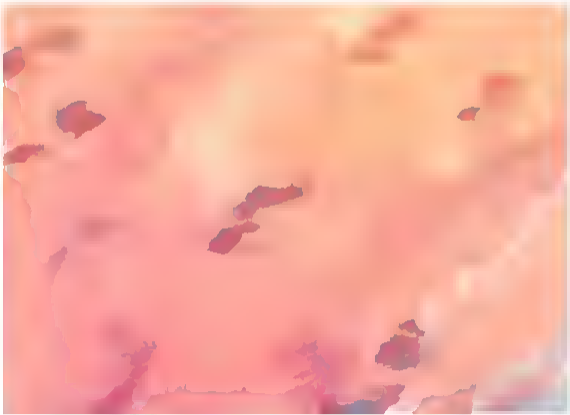
I'LL GO SEE AUSTEN TOMORROW
AND I'LL TAKE CAKE FOR US TO EAT AND HELP HER STUDY AND STUFF.
IF SHE'S FEELING OKAY ABOUT FINALS WEEK I'LL TELL HER IT'S MY BIRTHDAY.

IF SHE'S ALL STRESSED I WON'T TELL HER UNTIL AFTER THE SEMESTER'S OVER.
SO EITHER WAY, I WON'T BE KEEPING IT A SECRET FOR TOO LONG,
AND WE'LL STILL GET TO SPEND SOME TIME TOGETHER ON MY BIRTHDAY.

...
AND WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN SHE GETS JUSTIFIABLY UPSET THAT YOU DIDN'T TELL HER EARLIER?
I'LL SUGGEST WE BELATEDLY CELEBRATE BY PLAYING STARLIGHT SOLDIERS.

SHE'LL HATE THE GAME SO MUCH THAT SHE'LL WISH I'D NEVER TOLD HER ABOUT MY BIRTHDAY.
pfft

THAT'S NOT A COMPLTELY TERRIBLE IDEA.
DOES THAT MEAN I CAN COME OUT?
I really need to pee.
I STILL THINK YOU SHOULD TELL AUSTEN IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY NOW.
BUT I GUESS I'LL ALLOW IT.



SOMETIMES I WONDER WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF I'D LISTENED TO RAE.

AND DOES IT EVEN MATTER?

IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN GO BACK AND CHANGE THE PAST.

SO HERE'S WHAT DID HAPPEN:

I MADE A MISTAKE.
I SAID SOME THINGS
THAT I'LL ALWAYS REGRET.

AND ON THE AFTERNOON OF MY TWENTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY I MADE MY GIRLFRIEND CRY.

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